

Cowman to King – Kapilendra Deva

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A kid name *Kapila* from rural Kalinga (now Odisha) who came from a family so poor that they have to send him to take care of cow herd, otherwise known as cowman. As humble as it can get in medieval India. *Kapila* used to spend most of his time with his best friend named *Kashia*. The *Kashia Kapila* duo was famous in their area for their friendship. They both used to go to work together taking the cow herd with them for grazing. One day, *Kapila* was tired on a hot sunny day and went to take a nap during the day under the tree. He asked *Kashia* to look after the cows. *Kashia* was doing that and after a while he saw a horrific incident. He saw *Kapila* fast asleep, and a huge Cobra is standing on top of *Kapila*'s head, as if it's guarding him. *Kashia* shouted and the snake fled. *Kapila* was unaware of this and when *Kashia* told him about this, he laughed it away. But the elders of the village told them that this omen meant *Kapila* was no ordinary guy, and he is destined to become someone very renowned, possibly a king.

Time went on, and during one Rath Yatra, *Kapila*'s mother took him to Puri to see Jagannath rath yatra. *Kapila* was enjoying the grand festival when all of a sudden, he was lost. He couldn't find his mother. He kept looking for her, but in vain. After a while he became hungry and saw some left over prasada lying near *Aruna Stambha* (of Temple's entrance). *Kapila* started to eat it. Meanwhile King *Bhanudeva* (the fourth) was childless and was praying Jagannath for a successor to his Ganga dynasty. One day he dreamt of Lord Jagannath telling him that he will find his successor near Aruna Stambha, eating prasada from a broken mud pot (*khapara*). Luckily, he saw *Kapila* on that in Puri. The king asked his subjects to incorporate *Kapila* to their royal army.

Others in the royal army and ministry however were reluctant to accept *Kapila*. They could not believe that a cowman from such humble background can become a royal member overnight. But soon *Kapila* proved them wrong. He developed amazing skill in archery, sword fighting and horse riding. He was equally capable in people management and impressed everyone with his leadership abilities. Soon after *Bhanudeva* died, On 29th June 1435, *Kapila* was crowned as king of Kalinga and thus named,

Kapilendra Deva. Bhanudeva was the last king of Eastern Ganga empire, and with *Kapilendra Deva*, the *Gajapati* empire started. The word *Gajapati* literally means the master of Elephants. Kalinga had a huge army of thousands of war elephants who used to make the enemies run away with fear.

At that time, India was dominated mostly by Islamic sultanates. It was a horrible time for the native population who were always in danger of being prosecuted. The Islamic Sultanates were particularly ruthless towards their subjects and always on the lookout for conquests. Bengal Sultan Muzzafar Mahmud Shah attacked Kalinga with the aim of annexing part of the empire until river Ganga. But *Kapilendra Deva* led his army to blow a crushing defeat to the Sultan. *Kapilendra Deva* instead annexed a part of the Bengal Sultanate known as *Gouda* and added it to the Kalingan territory. Thus, he took up additional title of “*Goudeswara*” or the Lord of Gouda. Afterwards *Kapilendra Deva* constructed the *Kurumabedha* Fort in Gangeswar village, West Bengal which still stands.

Another of *Kapilendra Deva*’s successful campaign was against the Bahmani Sultan. In 1456 AD, Humayun Shah became the Sultan of Bahmani and unleashed atrocities against the Hindu population. When his brutalities crossed all limits, the Velama Chiefs rebelled against the Sultan and asked *Kapilendra* for help. *Kapilendra Deva* marched against the Bahmani Sultan, and with the help of the Velama chiefs, defeated the army of the Sultan. He took up the title of “*Kalabargeswara*” afterwards and extended his empire to the south. The Gajapati empire was soon extended until Warangal. He established the Udayagiri Fort (Currently in Andhra) as his southern military headquarters. Gajapati *Kapilendra* also defended Kalinga from the Muslim Sharqui ruler of Jaunpur.



Gajapati empire under *Kapilendra Deva* (in Yellow)

One day, *Kashia*, his childhood friend paid a visit to him. *Kashia* was not very hopeful that his best-fiend *Kapila* will recognize him. *Kashia* stood outside of the King's castle and let the guards know

about him. The guards relayed this message to Kapilendra. To the amazement of *Kashia*, *Kapilendra deva* came over himself to receive him. He was the same down-to-earth *Kapila* he knew from childhood! The humility of the king amazed many in his empire.

Kapilendra ruled for over 32 years from 1435 AD until his death in 1467. Sarala Das, a great poet who lived at the time of Kapilendra Deva has provided vivid accounts of the military arrangement of *Kapilendra Deva's* time. *Kapilendra* was not only a great warrior and King but was also a very humble person by heart. He was the first King of Odisha who refused to call himself as the King but described himself as the servant (or *sevak*) of Lord Jagannath. He formally took up the title of *Routray* which translates to the 'Chief Servant of Jagannath'. He made many temples across Odisha including the famous Kapileswara Temple. He made many structural enhancements to the Jagannath temple including the Narendra Pokhari in Puri. Thus, a mere cowman became one of the most successful Kings of not just Odisha but also in the whole of India. His story reminds us the proverb that "*Sky is the Limit*" if you have moral values and are driven towards your goal. *Kapila* became the great *Kapilendra Deva*!

Reference:

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